

April 6, 2000

Mr. James P. Mayer  
Executive Director  
Little Hoover Commission  
State of California  
925 L. Street, Suite 805  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Mayer:

Per your letter of February 28 inviting me to appear before the Little Hoover Commission on April 27<sup>th</sup>, here is the written testimony you requested. It responds directly to the four questions posed in your letter.

I look forward to appearing before the Commission to further describe the changes that are being instituted within the District. These are very exciting times and we expect the School Board to have voted on the reorganization proposal by the time the Commission convenes here in Los Angeles.

Sincerely,

Ramon C. Cortines  
Interim Superintendent

Enc.

C: Board Members  
Howard Miller, COO

**LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION  
WRITTEN TESTIMONY  
Ramon C. Cortines  
Interim Superintendent  
Los Angeles Unified School District  
April 27, 2000**

**1. Steps taken to develop an effective organizational structure that concentrates authority and responsibility on managers with experience in the development of school facilities.**

The [reorganization plan](#) that was submitted to the School Board for its approval on March 14<sup>th</sup> is our blueprint for changing the LAUSD. As it outlines recommendations for each section of the district, it addresses the obvious need to strengthen the Facilities Division. It provides recommendations to strengthen both the organizational structure as well as management improvements.

The need for experienced professionals is already being addressed. One of my first actions at LAUSD was to direct that the entire facilities operation be restructured. We brought in new highly-qualified individuals and re-assigned other District personnel to match professional skills to the function of the job. Kathi Littman was brought in from the private sector to head up the New Facilities Division. Rick Rodriguez, Ed Van Ginkle, and Rod Hamilton are private contractors brought in to work intensively to identify potential school sites for our most heavily impacted areas. Julie Crum was appointed to head up Existing Facilities. Lynn Roberts is managing Maintenance and Operations. A Community Relations Branch has been established within the New Facilities unit headed by Lorena Padilla-Melendez from Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard's office.

All of the division directors report to the Chief Facilities Executive. We have been fortunate to bring in Robert Buxbaum, formerly with New York City Schools, on an interim basis who is a consummate professional with the in-depth experience in managing school district construction programs that are very much needed at this time. And, we have already begun advertising for a permanent Chief Facilities Executive at an annual salary of at least \$190,000, which should be a competitive salary to attract permanent talent.

The changes outlined in the plan are intended to demonstrate that the district can establish efficiencies and serve the instructional needs of the children of Los Angeles, including a professional facilities division fully qualified to manage a

construction program that addresses both the present and future needs of the district.

The Facilities Services Division was carefully scrutinized in developing the reorganization plan and is described in detail on Pages 89 through 92. Each of you has received a copy of the plan, but attached are copies of that particular section. There have been some modifications made since the plan was first submitted as part of the on-going process of evaluation and feedback. These will be addressed in later testimony. But, again the entire focus of our work is to put in place an organizational structure that is fully accountable to the public and the taxpayers.

**2. Steps to be taken to provide for the development of a management team that can be held accountable for completing or failing to complete projects.**

Accountability and authority are the cornerstone of this entire plan. At every juncture it is built into the operation. There will be three separate divisions under the direction of the Chief Facilities Executive:

- School Building Planning and Construction (New Facilities)
- Facilities Modernization and Inspection (Existing Facilities)
- Maintenance and Operations

All of these positions have been upgraded and each individual will be held accountable for its area of responsibility. There is a very clear single chain of command. The three division directors answer to the Chief Facilities Officer and he reports to the Chief Operating Officer. New construction and major projects will remain in the Central office as a district-wide function and be managed by the Chief Facilities Officer. Some of the major renovation of existing facilities will also be better managed from the Central Services unit. At the present time the Environmental Health and Safety Division reports directly to the Chief Operating Officer. This will be reviewed after we have strengthened the management of this vital operation and after a permanent facilities officer has been hired.

The decentralization of facilities as called for in the reorganization plan will be implemented wherever local decision-making is involved. Thus, most of the renovation and all maintenance and operations functions will be moved into the eleven districts, where local decision-making is appropriate to the work. A facilities staff will be placed in each of the eleven district offices and will be supported by a carefully selected outside construction management firm. Each firm will be directly accountable to the local district and its superintendent.

Again, all of the work of the facilities unit is currently being directed by Robert Buxbaum who is setting exacting standards to guide and monitor the work of the unit. He is deeply enmeshed in identifying the steps to be taken to improve the operation and a structure within the eleven district configuration that will be both

efficient and accountable. The work is moving forward. It is clearly understood that shoddy work habits will not be tolerated. A process for communicating the status of their work to the Chief Operating Officer and the Superintendent and from him to the Board is in place.

Other experienced managers are working in the field with development experts and community groups to keep all interested parties informed of our on-going work.

**3. Steps taken to enhance the role of the Proposition BB Committee and other community leaders with expertise in the planning and development of facilities.**

The New Facilities Director has developed a plan whereby there will be project directors with proven credentials and expertise in each of the 11 districts who will work collaboratively with internal staff and the BB Oversight Committee.

As previously mentioned, a new Community Outreach Branch has been created within the New Facilities Division with Lorena Padilla-Melendez as Branch Director. An RFP was issued in late January soliciting community based organizations with appropriate experience and expertise to respond. These community organizations are to bring together all stakeholders in a given community to engage them in the school site selection process. By the end of April we expect to have initially hired between six and seven firms to help with this important work.

They will be working with the outside real estate specialists hired by the district to involve members of the community in the process and to help them understand the various criteria and conditions that a school district must address in selecting school sites. They are to include the public and the elected officials in the discussions to make them fully aware of options under consideration and so they can provide any local viewpoints that might impact the decision-making process.

An Outreach Hotline has been installed to receive community questions and comments about on-going activities. Bilingual operators will staff the phones and will refer calls to appropriate staff to provide the information requested or to the community experts for follow-up.

**4. Steps taken to ensure that school facility projects are efficiently and effectively managed under the multiple-district plan released in early January.**

As previously stated, the Central Facilities Division will oversee new construction and major projects. The local districts will be responsible for smaller projects as well as maintenance and operations through their chain of command. The

intention is that these eleven local facilities managers will set priorities and be more responsive and efficient as they make decisions and perform the work closer to the sites.

The reorganization plan establishes a strong Central Facilities Division to manage the over-arching needs of the District and, at the same time, allow the local districts to work directly with their communities to identify needs and set goals to provide the school facilities best suited to the individual needs of each local district. The tools and structure are being put into place to actively involve the private sector in a collaboration with the team of professional experts at both the Central Support Division as well as in the district operations.

We are already seeing the results of our work in elevating the quality of the staff, establishing a clear line of authority and aggressively managing the District's facilities operation.